

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 25, 2015

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write in support of the effort to counter violent extremism (CVE). In light of the February 2015 White House Summit on CVE, the focus on global youth events at the upcoming 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) continued recruitment of our young people, we welcome the opportunity to work with your administration to better protect our citizens from terrorist recruitment.

As we evaluate our progress, two areas we believe require additional attention and resources are youth and the digital battlespace. Our anti-ISIL coalition struggles to understand how young people engage in this digital battlespace and how the marketplace of extremist ideas and content has prospered to such an alarming extent.

A number of Senators have constituents from their states who have fallen prey to this digital recruitment. Some of them have successfully left the United States and joined ISIL. Others have, thankfully, been intercepted by authorities before doing so. Many of these individuals are young people from educated, middle class backgrounds, and friends and family members report nothing particularly unusual about them that could have predicted the course they chose.

Through interactions over social media, ISIL romanticizes its activities in Iraq and Syria to entice young men and women to support their terrorist activities. More than one in five of the Americans involved in Syria-related militant activity are women. Of those, one quarter are teenagers. Only too late do these interactions with ISIL recruiters become apparent.

Millennials are the largest consumers of online videos and are also major consumers of digital videos. Ninety percent of Americans between the ages of 18-29 use social media, ninety percent watch online videos, and almost half watch online news videos. Even when ISIL fades, it is probable that terrorists will continue to use digital mediums to recruit isolated young people from around the world.

We believe it is vital to enhance our focus on youth. Internationally, youth make up the majority of the population in many of the countries to which we deploy foreign assistance, a fact not always reflected in implementation. In the region most directly affected by ISIL's depravities, roughly 60 percent of the population is under 30. In Yemen, about 75 percent of the population is under 30. In Mali, the median age is nearly 16 years old. In Tunisia, youth unemployment among college graduates is 30 percent. Many are systemically excluded from civic engagement. This

can lead to frustration, disillusionment, and a higher acceptance rate of violence as a form of resistance.

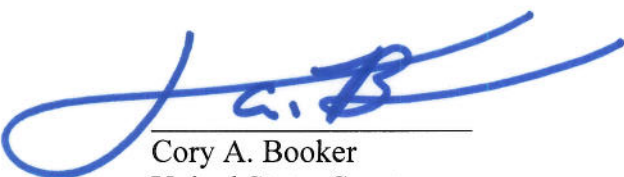
According to the last National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) estimate released in February, almost 3,400 Westerners have traveled to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside ISIL. While some of these people would have found their way to the fight no matter what, it would be incorrect to assume that most have joined ISIL to satisfy a deep-seated religious desire. Many have, as has been widely reported, been seduced by the barrage of digital content that ISIL has skillfully produced.

As the UN General Assembly convenes, we ask that your administration update Congress on the following:


- What is the relationship between the U.S. counter-ISIL policy, the global coalition, and the Countering Violent Extremism agenda?
- How can the U.S. and our partners move faster to build a groundswell of relevant and appealing content that more successfully counters ISIL propaganda?
- How can we empower parents, guardians, schools, and civil society leaders to identify youth that may be vulnerable to recruitment?
- What more can the U.S. and the global coalition do to secure greater involvement of the private sector in combatting digital recruitment – namely entertainment, Internet, and media companies?
- What is the vision and future structure of staffing and funding for the U.S. government's CVE agenda and leadership in guiding a global coalition?
- How do the administration's counter-ISIL and CVE strategies reflect lessons learned from the Global War on Terror and Counter-Insurgency doctrines?
- Going forward, how will the administration measure the success of its CVE efforts?

We support your efforts to bring together leaders and young civil society activists from around the world to build young people's resilience to violent extremism propaganda. We appreciate your attention to this issue and the commitment of the participants to youth-driven responses to this important issue. We hope to work with you to better protect our country and our young people.

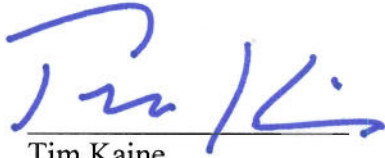
Sincerely,



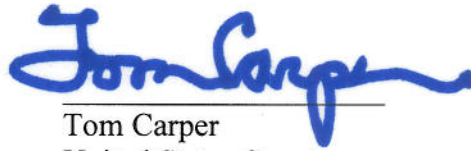
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Kelly A. Ayotte
United States Senator



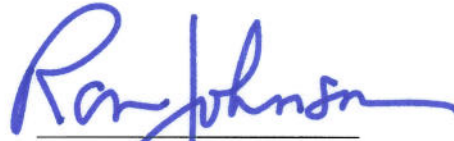
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Tom Carper
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Ron Johnson
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator